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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, JUNE 18, 2008

In Today's Papers

Erdogan Expects Court to Decide on AKP Closure in Late July
All papers report a Constitutional Court timetable indicates the chief prosecutor will give his verbal assessment on July 1 and Deputy Prime Minister Cemil Cicek will present the AKP's verbal defense on July 3. The file then will be submitted to the rapporteur who will draft a report for the judges before they reach a decision, say papers. On Monday, Prime Minister Erdogan told reporters he expected a verdict by the end of July.

EDITORIAL OPINION: The AKP's Defense against Closure

"A Weak Defense"

Gungor Mengi wrote in mainstream Vatan (6/18): "The AKP's defense argument is a good example of making a situation worse when trying to fix it. The defense is all about pride, rudeness and carelessness. Instead of outlining a defense what shows the AKP has no conflict with secular values, the AKP has exerted all of its efforts to explain its own interpretation of secularism. This comes as no surprise because the founders of the AKP have been talking about 'redefining secularism' from the very beginning. The AKP's understanding of secularism is clearly flawed because this party constantly and deliberately exploits religious values through politics. The AKP defense also argues that 'secularism cannot be a lifestyle,' which is a very dangerous approach and can lead to the loss of diverse lifestyles and beliefs. The majority of Turkish people share a common wish that the AKP should defend itself against closure and should not be closed. However, the nature of the AKP's defense will not help this wish come true."

"What's wrong with the Google Case?"

Ahmet Hakan wrote in mainstream Hurriyet (6/18): "The AKP defense is largely based on criticism that the Prosecutor's indictment relied solely on evidence acquired through Google's search engine. It is hard to understand this argument. What can possibly be wrong with a prosecutor using technology in order to gain and gather information? In addition, this argument fails to address the indictment's charges. No one would argue against the use of newspaper clippings and other printed materials in order to justify

an indictment. After all, the information gathered is public knowledge. A condescending attitude against internet research is a lame approach. The AKP should have focused on addressing the charges and finding inaccuracies in the indictment."

EU, Standard&Poor's on AKP Closure Case

Hurriyet, Sabah, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Ruppel called the closure lawsuit against Turkey's ruling AKP was an "extraordinary" case for the EU, but would not affect Turkey-EU ties. "We hope all political parties in Turkey will seek solutions in line with legal principles and democratic secularism; and we hope after the debates, a solution will be found in compliance with the European Court of Human Rights rulings and Venice Criteria," Ruppel emphasized. Slovenia currently holds the rotating EU presidency.

Meanwhile, papers report Standard&Poor's Turkey analyst Faruk Soussa said the possible closure of the AKP alone would not affect Turkey's credit rating, but, "What matters is how the investors would see it." The fact that political stability and trust appears negative doesn't mean Turkey's ratings will be lowered, according to Soussa. He warned tight economic policies might be needed, which could affect growth.

A New Gas Pipeline Agreement with Iran

Mainstream Hurriyet reports that in order to prevent natural gas shortage during the winter months, Turkey and Iran agreed to build a new gas pipeline. Iranian Deputy Gas and Oil Minister Riza Kasaesizadeh came to Turkey recently to discuss the pipeline and both parties agreed on the new gas pipeline. The new line will come

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directly to Bazergan border gate from Iran's Miandoab province.

Meanwhile, Energy Minister Hilmi Guler answered questions regarding reports U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Ross Wilson hinted the U.S. could strike Iran. Guler said, "I had a chat with Ambassador Wilson. I do not want to reveal details. When we hear such hints or comments, we explain our position and our priorities regarding Turkey's interests.

Rector Assignments Determined Today and Tomorrow

Hurriyet reports that university rector elections will be held in 21 universities today and tomorrow. Following his appointment of the Higher Education Board (YOK) President, President Gul will change almost all the rectors, who were assigned by former President Sezer. Because they criticized 'turban freedom' in the universities and contradicted the wishes of the government and the YOK on this issue recently, Akdeniz University Rector Mustafa Akaydin, METU Rector Prof.Ural Akbulut, Ankara University Rector Prof. Nusret Aras, Uludag University Rector Prof. Mustafa Abbas Yurtkuran and 19 May University Rector Prof. Ferit Bernay will be replaced by new rectors.

Controversial Privacy Draft

Liberal Radikal draws attention to a newly drafted privacy law that was submitted by the government to the parliament for approval within the framework of EU harmonization reforms. Even though the new draft looks like a modern initiative, some exceptions mentioned in the new regulations will give the police, gendarme and intelligence service MIT easier access to personal data. Radikal describes the draft as "the footsteps toward a police state." Bilgi University prepared a report on the new draft and drew attention to concerns about the exceptions in the bill. Originally, the bill called for a board comprised of NGOs and academics to oversee requests for personal data concerning private citizens' ethnic background and religious affiliation. However, the government has changed the draft so the board will be comprised of government officials. This, Radikal says, will make it easier for the Gendarme, MIT, and the police to acquire private data. Currently, a court order is required to access such information. The new plan streamlines the process by allowing the board of government officials to approve requests for private information.

Customs Tariffs to be Lowered among Islamic Countries

Mainstream Hurriyet and Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak report a

"Preferential Trade System" will be established among members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). "OIC Preferential Trade System" talks were held in Ankara yesterday and established tax reductions in OIC member states. The system will take effect in January 2009.

TV News:
NTV

Domestic News

- On Tuesday, visiting Greek Land Forces Commander General Dimitrios Voulgaris met with his Turkish counterpart General Ilker Basbug. Voulgaris is the first Greek land forces commander to visit Turkey.

- The Peace and Democracy Party (BDP) was established in Diyarbakir to replace the DTP in the pro-Kurdish party is closed.

- Former lawmaker and Kurdish activist Leyla Zana faces a prison sentence of up to five years for spreading PKK propaganda in a speech during Nevruz celebrations in Diyarbakir last year.

International News

- Lynn Pascoe, UN Undersecretary General for Political Affairs, is in Cyprus for meetings with the leaders of the Greek and Turkish

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Cypriot communities, as part of efforts to help toward a political settlement.

- Pakistani scientist Abdul-Qadeer Khan has denied claims that he sold plans for an advanced nuclear weapon to Iran or North Korea.

- A UNHCR report says the global number of refugees and displaced people reached 67 million last year.

WILSON